"CARPE VIAM."

A Poem,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SENIOR CLASS

AT THE

HALL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF

THEIR CLASS DAY

JUNE 2d, 1865,

BY

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"Sed jam age—Carpe Viam—Et susceptum, perfice munus."
Virg. Æneid VI: 629.

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Dedication.

TO MY FRIENDS AND FELLOW STUDENTS OF THE CLASS OF '65,

THIS POEM

IS DEDICATED AS A REMINISCENCE OF THOSE HAPPY HOURS OF COLLEGE LIFE, WHICH ARE "NOT LOST, BUT GONE FOREVER."

"Carpe Diam."

As the far distant echoes of some strain
  Borne as from dream-land o'er the glassy sea,
Whose music ceases, and then comes again,
  Seeming a syren's sweetest melody,
Now, as the gentle carol of a bird,
  Now, as an angel-chorus from the skies,
Till the great organ's thundering notes are heard
  To rule supreme, and o'er each discord rise,
So laden with the fragrance of the past,
  The fresh and dewy breath of memory
Awakes like Orpheus, magic strains at last,
  And drowns all else in one grand harmony.
Now are forgotten all the hours of strife,
  Hushed are our voices as the silent dead;
And rising from our day dreams into life,
  All but the pleasant memories have fled.
Forgotten are our murmurs and complaints,
  Thoughts of the future now our minds engage:
Thrice blessed is that power that always paints
  In living lines the past—the golden age!

Throw out the canvass to the wind,
  The harbor disappears,
The quiet shores we leave behind
  And with them all our fears!

Onward we press with generous strife,
Our streaming pennants tell
We're launched upon the sea of life,
Our college days, Farewell!

The sparkling waters dash and foam,
There's not a cloud in sight:
Upon the unbounded waste we roam,
Our future fair and bright.
We've waited on the anchorage,
And though the skies may frown,
May He who rules the tempest's rage,
Ne'er let our bark go down!

The winds are fair, aye, passing fair,
Each pilot at the wheel
Stands firmly braced, for only there
He guides the vessel's keel.
That wheel of fate let each one seize,
And hold it to the last!
Trim not your course to every breeze,
The zephyr or the blast.

Our wake is luminous with light,
It dazzles from afar,
Each happy thought to memory bright,
A phosphorescent star.
The boundless ocean is around,
The haven is before us,
And he who gains the port is crowned
By angels hovering o'er us.

Out, out upon the stormy sea
Each bark is hurrying on,
We bear each other company,
But soon we shall be gone.
On different tracks we bear away,
Our sails with breezes swell,
We dip our colors, as we say,
Ye college days, Farewell!

Oh! happy hours embalmed by us forever,
How like the dew-drops do ye fade away;
For time, that bound us as a class together
Now scatters, as a rock the dashing spray.

Here then we meet to take our farewell greeting,
Where we have met so many times before:
How quickly have these college years—so fleeting,
Forever gone, to come to us no more.

He who shall mount on wings to fame or glory,
Whose brow shall with the laurel's wreath be crowned,
Sharing the honor, we shall tell the story;
He in the class of sixty-five was found!

How short are the hours in which to achieve
The joy of man's fondest endeavor;
Then as brothers and men, we'll be true to "Old Penn"—
To our dear Alma Mater forever!

Oh! let us not waste in the spring time of youth
The days that can come again never;
But be true to ourselves, and be true to our class,
And our dear Alma Mater forever!

We part, but the bonds of our friendship and love,
Are bonds that no power can sever;
For through life we'll remember our college days gone—
And our dear Alma Mater forever!

Yet shall we grieve because the college portal
Closes while life's broad gates are open thrown;
Oh! are not living thought and mind immortal,
Shall we not reap above what here is sown?

Onward to life then, and though we would linger
But for one parting grasp from each true heart,
Truth bids us, beckoning upward with her finger,
Live while we live, then meet no more to part!

Oh, Time! how strange thou art!
Thou hoary-headed king, with ages gray;
How thou do'st trifle with each hopeful heart
In wanton play!

Oh! Thou imperious lord;
Thy sway is boundless, and thy stern command:
Each Gordian knot is cut as with a sword
From thy great hand!

The cradle and the tomb,
By thee are joined in life—a year, a day;
'Tis when the flowers of earth are in their bloom
That they decay.

Speak, wintry Time:—oh! why
Should life be chained by iron links to death;
Why should the new-born child begin to die
With his first breath?

The Pyramids declare
The truth that life is short, and art is long;
Where are the hands that reared them, where, oh! where
That countless throng?

High o'er the buried dead,
Like mountain walls that echo with the strife;
We hear the solemn, never-ending tread
Of death and life!

The Roman hero's arch,
The ruined domes and columns, so sublime,
Point, like the fabled causeway, to the march
Of Giant Time!

The world is growing old!
Its years are numbered; yes, there is a day,
When dissolution's icy fingers cold
With death shall play.

Oh! what a mockery this!
  There was an Eden once, but at the gate
Despair stood waiting side by side with bliss;
    And still they wait!

Tell me, ye sentinels—why
  Must man with his proud hopes be crushed forever?
Why from unfinished matter do ye try
    The mind to sever?

Oh! judge not of life
  By the moments of time,
As ye judge not the man
  In his vigor and prime
By the size of his brain
  At the day of his birth:
So measure not life
  By the inches of earth.

Away with the fetters
  That custom would forge
To rivet our spirits
  Far down in Time's gorge,
While the high mountain summits
  Of Reason and Faith—
Point out man's true life
  Through the shadow of death.

Oh! soar like the eagle
  Above earth's dim sphere,
Where the pittance of life
  Is doled out by the year!
For with eyes on the sun,
  Ever upwards he flies—
And in majesty mounts
  To his home in the skies.

Like the child with his blocks,
Building houses so tall,
That the greater their height,
The more certain their fall;
So he who will build not
His house on the Rock,
Must expect it to perish
When shock comes on shock!

The man who will cling
To the frame-work of time,
Nor ascend to the stars,
To a future sublime;
With his half-finished plans,
And his hopes of renown,
In the ruin is found
When the scaffold comes down!

The fountain of perennial youth
Which Leon, in that land of flowers—
Sought vainly for, but found, forsooth,
That man with all his god-like powers,
Must feel the chilling touch of age;
Though but a legend of the past
To Ponce De Leon, to the sage
Has hidden truth with meaning vast.

Ah! Bimini, thy waters fail!
And all thy drops of early dew—
Which maidens gathered in the vale,
To keep their bloom of beauty new.
Cease, votaries of time, your pains;
Oh! follow not that marshy fire
Which ever lures us on, but wanes
When in the grasp of our desire!

Though men have dreamed, and poets told,
And minstrels sung of golden times,
Where never, never growing old,
But always young in fairy climes:

We shall be ever blest with youth;
  We wish not thus for tinselled glory,
And knocking at the door of truth,
  Are not content with Eastern story.

Yes! like Prometheus, we would dare
  To draw the secret from the sky;
We would not ask for truth, nor care
  Like Pilate for his Lord's reply.
Is there eternity to mind?
  Are our half-finished actions vain?
Shall man his recompense not find,
  For all his labor and his pain?

  As sure as stand God's fixéd laws,
His image stamped upon man's face,
The gift of life—germ of the race—
  That essence of the great first Cause.

  With aspirations yet unborn,
And senses all unknown to earth—
Can never die; its higher birth
  Is on eternity's great morn.

  The reason undeveloped here,
And budding only, cannot die:
But like the sun when noonday high
  Will shine in heaven's pure atmosphere.

  How pale its light on earth!—how dark!
Except where Revelation's ray
Points out the only living way,
  As shines the beacon for the bark!

  An island in the sea of space,
We walk upon the shifting shore;
We hear the ocean's ceaseless roar,
  And see its waves our steps efface.

We hurry on—we soon are gone;
We scan the undiscovered main—
That ocean all unknown—in vain,
While still the tide is hurrying on!

We are but in our school-days here,
With faculties all dwarfed and blunted;
Our highest growth of reason stunted,
When midway in its proud career.

A half a century is man's,
A thousand years is Nature's time;
Which in this strange, uneven clime
Is needed to complete their plans!

But when immortal we shall rise
To study from the Master's hand,
And with the angels understand
What now is hidden from our eyes—

'Twill be an ever-growing bliss
To watch the planets on their way,
With suns and systems, and to say:
"Far back on earth I knew of this!"

The tablets of our memory
Will shine like plates of burnished steel;
What now is lost, they will reveal,
And what we know not, we shall see!

Yes, we on earth can fit the mind
For higher pleasures yet to come—
When through the universe we roam,
And ever hidden wonders find.

For all that we have gathered here,
And stored away deep in the brain,
Will never have been sought in vain,
But live in the celestial sphere.

Thus God has said, "Let there be light;"
And what in earth's dark caves was made
The sooty carbon, has obeyed
His voice, and is the diamond bright.

Light—Light is breaking out, for, lo!
The problem now is solved; for Death,
That darkening cloud, as with one breath,
Is scattered!—and the rest, we know!

Then, courage for the field of strife!
The trumpets' call to arms we hear:
Arouse! Awake! Oh, never fear
The conflict and the din of life!

Oh, may we live indeed, our aims
Be ever upwards, that our names
May shine in lines of light:
As shine the planets on their way—
Not like the shooting star whose day
Of glory sinks to night!
For such is man's short glory here:
It dazzles but to disappear
In darkness perfect, infinite,
Made blacker by the meteor bright.
Oh, may we use our talents given
For use on earth, for joy in heaven,
That we, as faithful servants blest,
May enter on our heavenly rest!
True to our country, may we stand
Firm in the right, strike down the hand
Of miscreant traitor who would dare,
From our bright galaxy, to tear
One single star: that flag must wave,
Studded with all its gems: aye, save
Complete that glory of the past
A perfect banner to the last!

True to our principles, the sound
From bugle ever should be found
Certain and true: ring—ring it out:
"Our land is saved!"—to-day we shout!

Here, then, where our paths converging—
Ever to this centre merging,
Where our interests are common,
And our hopes and fears the same,
We arrive; while still the shifting
Landmarks on the shore seem drifting
Back upon the waters, lifting
Far away our common aim:
Now must each one carve his fortune;
Now must each one carve his name—
Carve it on the scroll of fame!

Man may take the path to glory
Over fields of strife, all gory
With the wounded and the dying,
With the blood of thousands slain!
While the banners o'er him streaming,
And the myriad bayonets gleaming,
May delight the hero dreaming
Dreams of glory, till insane
At the shrine of Fickle Fortune,
When his star is on the wane,
Finds he that 'tis all in vain!

Or a quiet life preferring,
Never from the forest stirring,
Far away from strife and bustle,
As a hermit he may dwell!
Ever seeking, ever learning,
For the truths of Nature yearning,
With his selfish science burning
In the silence of his cell:
Loving no one, loved by no one.

Who his acts of love can tell?
Has he used his talent well?

In the forum, at the meeting
Of the politician, greeting
Friends and clients, ever seeking
Chance and changes, he may be
Head of party or of faction;
By his zeal, or by inaction,
Gaining ends by sad exaction
From his store of honesty:
Listened to by wondering senates;
Then forsaken, bankrupt, see
Him broken down in poverty.

Man may live for time, abusing
His great powers; or, never using
Mind or body, he may fritter
Life in idleness away.
Oh, whatever be our calling,
Never from our station falling
Into chains so strong, so galling,
Led by Giant hands astray,
Ever looking upwards, may we
Fight and conquer: so we say,
"Carpe Viam"—*carve your way!*

Now are we ready for the stage of life,
Where men are busy actors of themselves!
The music of the orchestra is hushed;
The curtain rises on us while we stand
Alone before the audience of the world!
Life has but been with us thus far one act
Of preparation: our rehearsals now
Are over, and the work of life begins!
Oh, if we hearken to our prompter's voice—
The voice of conscience; if we do but throw

Away the masks of other men and means,
And act *ourselves*, the drama of our life,
Amidst the plaudits of the world, will close;
And upwards, borne on holy angel's wings,
The soul will enter on its higher life!

Brothers, I turn to you! Oh, men, be true!
True to your God, your country, and yourselves.
There is a river in the ocean, one
Great current, irresistible and strong!
So, in the sea of life, whate'er our track,
There is one current which if we do take,
We shall be borne against opposing tides;
And whilst our fellows struggle vainly on,
We shall be wafted to the golden shore!